



Complementary Capabilities from the Sea

By CARL E. MUNDY, JR.

U.S. Marine Corps photo



The success of our Armed Forces in recent years is well documented. In addition to dealing swiftly and decisively with numerous crises and major contingencies throughout the globe, the services have demonstrated on various occasions their utility to the Nation in situations short of war. Our efforts have significantly contributed to the radical transformation of the world over the last four years, and to the improved strategic position of the United States.

Without doubt each service has played a unique and invaluable role in the victories that we have achieved. Moreover, there is no doubt that developments in joint warfare have been instrumental in our triumphs on the battlefield and success in promoting U.S. interests in assorted ways and under a variety of circumstances.

Since the enactment of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 the services have taken joint warfare to a new level. The brilliant performance of U.S. forces during Desert Storm is a reflection of our ability to operate together as a cohesive joint team. But as we reorganize and reorient the Armed Forces to meet the demands of an uncertain future, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. Today we have the rare opportunity to adapt and apply ourselves to a new security environment. To capitalize on this opportunity the services must continually examine their contributions to the Nation's defense and ensure they are prepared to meet the challenges that lie ahead. Future military success will also depend on maintaining a system of joint warfare that draws upon the unique strengths of each service, while providing the means for effectively integrating them to achieve the full combat potential of the Armed Forces.

Focusing on Capabilities

Each service—consistent with its role and assigned functions—contributes to what General Powell describes as a toolbox of capabilities. The combatant commanders in chief (CINCs) draw from this toolbox to meet requirements in their respective areas of responsibility. As we continue to make drastic cuts in the size of the Armed Forces, it is extremely important to retain a balance of carefully developed, complementary capabilities in that toolbox. While fiscal realities demand that we reduce redundancies, history warns us of the risks incurred when we allow gaps to exist in our capabilities. Successful joint warfare demands that we understand, maintain, and properly employ the unique capabilities of all the services.

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But achieving success in the face of future challenges will require more than just maintaining complementary capabilities. It also calls for integrating service capabilities and making efforts to achieve joint synergy on the battlefield. This demands continuing to develop and refine joint warfare to keep pace with changes in defense strategy, ad-

vances in technology, and other variables. It also means that prospective joint force commanders (JFCs) and their staffs must understand joint doctrine and have an appreciation of the capabilities that each service brings to the joint family of capabilities.

Joint warfare does not mean that each service will be equally represented each time a CINC conducts an operation. In selecting the right tools for the job the CINC considers the particulars of the mission and the conditions under which it must be accomplished. It is the responsibility of the services to identify packages of forces or force modules from which the CINC can select the right mix of capabilities to satisfy his requirements.

Some of the factors that influence the process of selecting the right tools for the job can be illustrated by comparing two recent operations. In 1989 the requirements and nature of Operation Just Cause in Panama made it predominantly an Army-Air Force show. It was a land-force operation in which the United States enjoyed ready access to airfield facilities and had a large number of Army forces in theater before the outbreak of hostilities. Conversely, when Operation Sea Angel was conducted in Bangladesh in 1991, no permanently based U.S. forces were situated nearby and the local infrastructure had been decimated. These conditions and other factors dictated that the operation be conducted by forces

that were self-sustained and primarily sea-based. Thus, it was largely a Navy-Marine Corps operation in which a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) formed the nucleus of the joint task force.

Joint warfare does mean that the capabilities of each service must be both interoperable and complementary. This must be the case on all levels of war: strategic, operational, and tactical. In addition to a common understanding of doctrinal matters, joint warfare requires that the services possess compatible communications equipment to exchange information and standardized consumables to facilitate service support. In the past decade, the Armed Forces have greatly improved the ability to fight together by making strides in these and other areas.

One can gain an appreciation for how far we have come by comparing the post mortem on Operation Urgent Fury with that of Operation Desert Storm. Much has been written about the poor coordination among the services in 1983 during Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada. After-action reports highlighted numerous problems including the inability of the services to communicate with each other, unclear command relationships, counterproductive interservice rivalries, and significant deficiencies in planning and coordinating supporting arms. While the mission was accomplished, it is generally agreed that we failed miserably in achieving unity of effort and were not as effective as we should have been.

In Desert Storm, which was conducted eight years after Urgent Fury, the overall story was much different. Although some deficiencies in jointness were identified, the services understood joint warfare and fought as a team. Command relationships were clearly understood and the major shortfalls identified during Urgent Fury were rectified. In the title V report to Congress, the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force were described as having "demonstrated a quantum advance in joint interaction."

Today, as Armed Forces adapt to a new strategic landscape and severe budgetary constraints, it is important that we build upon the success of Desert Storm and other recent operations. We must engage in a continuous process of evaluation to identify and maintain the capabilities we will need to deal with future challenges. As we do we



Combat Camera Center photo by Perry Heimer

Col Charles Russell, USAF, Deployed Base Commander, explains air operations to the Commandant during a visit to Somalia.

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must continue to focus on improving our ability to fully integrate those capabilities whenever the formation of a joint task force is required. This is the proper focus and the driving force behind the development of the capabilities which the Marine Corps currently provides to the CINCs.

Supporting National Military Strategy

Although the Nation is in the midst of drastically reducing the number of forces permanently based overseas, our national security strategy continues to demand that we remain proactive in shaping an international security environment that promotes U.S. interests and influence. Thus our national military strategy emphasizes the need for forward deployed forces to deter aggression, demonstrate commitment, foster regional stability, lend credibility to alliances, and when necessary enhance crisis response capabilities.

The Marine Corps, with the requirements of the national military strategy clearly in focus, and in close cooperation with the Navy, has recently conducted a no-holds barred reassessment of its role in the Nation's defense. This study validated the traditional Marine Corps role as a naval expeditionary force in readiness, and confirmed the continued relevance of the forward presence and crisis response capabilities that the Marine Corps provides to the CINCs. As a result of this internal audit and recent operational experience, we have also undertaken a number of initiatives to enhance our capabilities to support joint operations.

Forward Presence

The Marine Corps, as a key component of naval expeditionary forces, is unique in its ability to support the CINCs in fulfilling the requirements for forward presence in the littoral areas of the world. The characteristics of forward deployed Marines, embarked aboard naval ships, make them an invaluable asset for projecting influence. As a seabased force they are unrestricted by basing or overflight requirements, self-sustained, and extremely mobile.

To meet the day-to-day requirements of the CINCs for forward presence in regions vital to our national interests, the Marine Corps routinely deploys Marine Expedi-

tionary Units (MEUs). These 2,000 man Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs), embarked in amphibious ready groups of three to five ships, are extremely flexible and over the years have proven to be most useful. The specific size, organization, and equipment of these units have evolved over four decades through continuous development and use in a forward presence role; in short, the MEU is tailored to provide the CINC with the capabilities he is most likely to need.

While deployed, MEUs frequently conduct port visits, military-to-military contacts, and combined exercises. These activities complement diplomatic efforts throughout the globe, help to maintain our system of collective security, and often provide the foundation of friendship and trust necessary for building coalitions in time of crisis.

Crisis Response

A forward deployed MEU also provides the CINC with a force that directly links his forward presence and crisis response capabilities. As a combined arms force, the MEU provides the CINC with credible combat power which can be rapidly dispatched to an area in which a crisis is developing. The ability of these forces to linger on station in a crisis area for extended periods is a significant advantage for decisionmakers as they monitor the situation and determine when, how, or whether to respond. Often, the very presence of the MEU can prevent a crisis from escalating to a higher level of violence. If a situation calls for more than presence, MEUs can swiftly make the transition from projecting influence for deterrence to projecting combat power to halt aggression.

MEUs are capable of acting independently in many instances, and conducting a wide range of missions to include amphibious raids, humanitarian assistance operations, and the evacuation of noncombatants. In situations where a crisis cannot be suppressed and armed conflict erupts, the MEU provides the CINC with a force that can be employed to facilitate the introduction of a larger MAGTF or joint force. The flexibility of forward deployed MEUs was clearly demonstrated during Operation Sharp Edge in 1990. During that operation, elements of a MEU remained off the coast of war-torn Liberia for seven months as the situation was monitored. When develop-

ments pointed to American lives being in jeopardy, Marines were quickly deployed to provide security for the U.S. Embassy and, subsequently, to assist in the evacuation of over 2,000 noncombatants.

Operation Provide Comfort offers another example of how a forward deployed MEU can give CINCs the ability to quickly respond to crises in vital regions of the world. On April 9, 1991, the 24th MEU (Special Operations Capable) was midway through a scheduled six-month Mediterranean deployment when ordered to respond to a rapidly deteriorating situation in Northern Iraq. Hundreds of Kurdish refugees fleeing the forces of Saddam Hussein were dying of malnutrition, exposure, and disease each day; thousands had fled to neighboring Turkey, creating a further threat to regional stability. The 24th MEU, in the midst of a routine training exercise in Italy, arrived on the scene within four days. Because of its command and control capabilities, the MEU

served as the nucleus of a joint task force formed to resolve the growing crisis. In the next three months, the 24th MEU was a key component in a massive relief effort

for an estimated 500,000 beleaguered refugees. The tasks assigned to the MEU included providing security, delivering tons of supplies, establishing resettlement camps, and providing water, dental, and medical care to refugees.

The Stabilizing/Enabling Capability

To respond to larger crises or contingencies, the Nation requires a broad spectrum of military options. This requirement demands that the CINCs have the ability to rapidly and flexibly sequence the deployment and employment of a wide range of capabilities. The CINCs meet this requirement through the process of adaptive planning. Adaptive planning provides the CINCs with a menu of preplanned options with which to respond to a crisis or contingency. The Marine Corps, to support adaptive planning, has developed crisis action modules (CAMs), which provide the CINCs with a menu of Marine Corps capabilities to choose for a particular mission.

In addition to providing forward presence and crisis response options with MEUs, the Marine Corps provides CINCs with other flexible force options. They offer the CINC the ability to quickly transition from relatively small forces within forward-presence forces to heavier, more capable contingency forces needed to respond to a large crisis or major regional conflict. The true value of the CAMs is their ability to give the CINC a rapidly deployable, integrated, self-sustained, combined arms capability early in a crisis.

MAGTFs have great flexibility; they provide CINCs with a force that has sufficient combat power which can be used, as the situation dictates, to resolve a conflict and restore stability, or to enable the arrival of a larger joint force. If necessary, MAGTFs can conduct forcible entry from amphibious ships or be deployed together with maritime prepositioning ships. Although Marine forces can deploy by a single means, CAMs have been developed so that MAGTFs can integrate all mobility assets in both building and deploying forces. Thus a MAGTF can deploy by combining elements of strategic airlift, amphibious ships, and maritime prepositioning forces. This inherent deployment and employment flexibility, combined with other characteristics of a MAGTF, provide CINCs with unique capabilities for rapidly building up combat power in littoral crises or conflicts.

Operation Desert Shield is a classic example of force sequencing and the role Marines can play as an enabling force for follow-on joint forces. Five days after the President gave the order to deploy, a Marine expeditionary force began to arrive at airfields in Saudi Arabia to link up with its equipment loaded aboard a maritime prepositioning squadron. The force provided the commander in chief, U.S. Central Command, with his first significant mechanized forces with which to defend Saudi Arabia. The rapid deployment of this credible Marine air-ground force, which arrived with 30 days of sustainability, helped stabilize the situation and enabled the buildup of heavier forces.

The recent operation in Somalia, Restore Hope, is also illustrative of Marine Corps enabling capabilities. The initial force committed was a MEU; this unit was in the midst of a scheduled deployment and stood poised off the Somali coast for weeks as the National

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Command Authorities weighed their options. When a decision was made to intervene, the force was immediately available. Despite the extremely limited infrastructure of Somalia, Marines were able to land, establish secure air and port facilities, and begin engineering work to enable more troops and equipment to join in the relief effort. Once again, Marines were able to do all this in a matter of days because they are sea-based, self-sustained, able to operate in an austere environment, and positioned and prepared to respond instantaneously to a crisis.

Relevant Capabilities for the Future

This is not to say that Marines are satisfied with the status quo. We recognize that today's capabilities exist only because our predecessors were innovative and forward thinking. No less an effort is needed to prepare for the future.

The conceptual underpinning for tomorrow is articulated in the Navy and the Marine Corps white paper entitled "... From The Sea." This document states that the future direction of the Navy and Marines is to focus on operating forward in the littoral areas of the world, and to provide naval expeditionary forces shaped for joint operations and tailored for the Nation's needs. For the Marine Corps, this entails building on the capabilities we have traditionally provided. We are aggressively working on a number of internal initiatives and participating in some multi-service ventures that will enhance our joint warfare capabilities and thus our usefulness to the CINCs:

- ▼ Appointment of a two-star Marine Corps general to the Navy staff to facilitate integration of Navy and Marine Corps planning and programming, enhance joint interoperability, and better support the unified commanders in chief and their naval component commanders.

- ▼ Implementation of a restructuring plan which includes allocation of additional personnel to the Marine Expeditionary Force's command element to fulfill the requirements of joint task force operations. This plan also will increase the communications capability of the Fleet Marine Force headquarters to enhance connectivity associated with component obligations.

- ▼ Establishment of the Naval Doctrine Command to ensure the smooth integration of the Navy and the Marine Corps into joint operations.

- ▼ Active participation in DOD modeling and simulation initiatives designed to enhance joint force training and exercises.

These and other steps will ensure that Marine Expeditionary Forces retain their unique capabilities in the years ahead and continue to complement the capabilities of the other services. Most importantly, Marine forces will continue to provide what the CINCs need to accomplish their missions.

Staying the Course

The Armed Forces have significantly improved their joint interoperability in the last decade. Combat effectiveness has greatly improved because of emphasis on initiatives such as compatible communications equipment and logistics requirements. We have also benefitted from the effort to make service doctrine consistent with joint doctrine. This has been accomplished without sacrificing the flexibility which joint force commanders require in order to employ their assigned forces in the manner best suited to accomplishing the mission.

Recent successes in developing joint warfare and, more critically, on the battlefield can be attributed to the ability to move forward and make needed, beneficial changes without losing focus on what is most important—our capabilities. As we proceed to make adjustments in joint warfare, the continued focus on maintaining the right balance of carefully developed, complementary capabilities will ensure our future success. JFQ